

Political implications to the development of the first National Bibliography of Kosovo

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Abstract:

In small countries like Kosovo, which have gone through many political and cultural changes, developing a national bibliography has been an almost impossible mission for a long time. Now, the National Library of Kosovo is developing the Bibliography of Albanian Books 1912-1999, a process that requires an enormous energy, due to political and cultural circumstances that have tagged along the publication of Albanian books and Albanian authors for almost a century. The difficulty to develop a National Bibliography of Kosovo appears in the background, because the Bibliography of Albanian Books Project is certainly not equivalent to the National Bibliography of Kosovo. Accordingly, this article will reveal historical, professional and technical processes involved in developing the Kosovo Albanian Book Bibliography and discuss professional and technical matters around the development of the National Bibliography of Kosovo, by analysing professional issues, political implications, cultural and linguistic diversity and legal infrastructure as a communicative regulator between the Library and publishers.

Keywords: *Kosovo, National Library of Kosovo, Bibliography of Albanian Books, National Bibliography of Kosovo.*

Introduction

The notion of *Bibliography of Kosovo* is almost unknown in the entire bibliographic literature. It is known when associated with dates, names and years, which are sometimes linguistic determinants, at times temporal, and often conceptual, but which one can mainly find associated with the *book*, as a formal determinant, and *Albanian* language, as linguistic determinant, both being fundamental determinants attached to each other because of the need for cultural identification. This is how the first bibliography on publications in Albanian language in Kosovo, entitled *Bibliografi publikimesh në gjuhën shqipe në Kosovë e Metohi* (alb. *Bibliography of Publications in Albanian Language in Kosovo and Metohija*) began. In

institutional terms, it began in 1968, when the Bibliographic Service at the National Library of Kosovo was established. In 1972, *Bibliografia e Librit Shqip në Jugosllavi* (alb. *Bibliography of Albanian Book in Yugoslavia*), compiled by the Bibliography Service, appeared as a coherent bibliography, and its primary goal was to identify Albanian publications in Kosovo, despite its broad designation. The publication of the bibliography ceased soon, and its periodic compilation as per cultural and political developments determined its fate, which has been following it for many decades now.

Background

The publishing industry in the Albanian language in Kosovo was consolidated in 1944. The *Regional Library of Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija*, now the National Library of Kosovo, opened the same year. After more than two decades of the lives of these two libraries – one as producer of culture, and the other as guardian thereof – the Bibliographic Service (now the Department of Bibliography) was founded in 1968, within the National Library of Kosovo.

Though Kosovo publications in Albanian were recorded in the *Bibliography of Serbia* and *Bibliography of Yugoslavia*¹ from 1944 to the '90s, Kosovar researchers were aware of the worth and importance of developing the Bibliography of Kosovo, especially a large bibliographic system like the Yugoslav one. The Kosovo bibliography for publications in Albanian language began in 1959.

Ali Rexha authored *Bibliografi publikimesh në gjuhën shqipe në Kosovë e Metohi: 1944-1958* [*Bibliography of Publications in Albanian Language in Kosovo and Metohija 1944-1958*], in sequels and in 16 issues of the *Përparimi* [*Progress*] monthly cultural magazine, published in Prishtina from 1959 to 1961. On the other hand, the catalogue entitled *Pesëmbëdhjetë vjet veprimtari botuese në Kosovë 1945-1960* [*Fifteen Years of Publishing Activity in Kosovo 1945-1960*] was published by *Rilindja* [*Renaissance*] Publishing House in 1960.

The first bibliography, compiled by the Bibliographic Service of the National Library of Kosovo in 1968, was titled *Skicë e Bibliografisë mbi Skenderbeun* [*An Overview of Bibliography on Skanderbeg*], which was followed by the publication of coherent bibliographies on publications in Albanian language in former Yugoslavia and catalogues and bibliographies of journals:

Bibliografia e Librit Shqip në Jugosllavi: (botimet e vitit 1966) [*Bibliography of the Albanian Book in Yugoslavia: (Publications of 1966)*]², published in 1972;

Bibliografia e Librit Shqip në Jugosllavi: (botimet e vitit 1967), 1973 [*Bibliography of Albanian Books in Yugoslavia: (Publications of 1967)*, 1973];

Bibliografia e Librit Shqip në Jugosllavi: (botimet e vitit 1968), 1973 [*Bibliography of Albanian Books in Yugoslavia: (publications of 1968)*, 1973];

Bibliografia e Librit Shqip në Jugosllavi: (botimet e vitit 1969), 1973 [*Bibliography of Albanian Books in Yugoslavia: (publications of 1969)*, 1973];

¹ Injac, Vesna. (2010). *Bibliography of Serbia – free online edition*. World Library and Information Congress: 76th Ifla General Conference And Assembly 10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden, pp. 1-11

² The bibliography was previously published in the *Përparimi* cultural magazine.

Një pasqyrë e veprimtarisë botuese në Kosovë, 1973 [*An Overview of Publishing Activity in Kosovo, 1973*];

30 vjet të veprimtarisë botuese në Kosovë, 1975 [*30 Years of Publishing Activity in Kosovo, 1975*];

Bibliografia e periodikut: artikuj të zgjedhur (1977) [*Bibliography of the Periodical: Selected Articles (1977)*]

And the bibliography of the most popular cultural magazine called *Jeta e Re* [*New Life*): *Jeta e Re: Bibliografi: 1949-1974* (1976); *Jeta e Re: Bibliografi: 1975-1979* (1980); *Jeta e Re: Bibliografi: 1980-1989* (1990).

In 1988, the Library published *Bibliografia e Disertacioneve të doktoratave në KSA të Kosovës: 1947-1982* [*Bibliography of Doctorate Dissertations in SAP of Kosovo: 1947-1982*], compiled by the SPA of Kosovo Referral Centre. A sequel to the bibliography was published in 2007, but under the catalogue title: *Katalog i Disertacioneve të Doktoratave: 1999-2004* [*Catalogue of Doctorate Dissertations: 1999-2004*]. Other educational and cultural institutions published two important bibliographies in 1985: The University of Kosovo in Prishtina (now the University of Prishtina) published *Bibliografia e publikimeve mësimore universitare të botuara në periudhën 1970-1985* [*Bibliography of University Educational Publications Published in 1970-1985*], and the Institute of Textbooks and Learning Tools, the largest publishing house of school textbooks at the time, compiled the *Bibliografia e Librit Shkollor në Kosovë: 1945-1985* [*Bibliography of School Books in Kosovo: 1945-1985*]. As of 2004, the NLK resumed the compilation of bibliographies, and in 2004 compiled two journal bibliographies: *Bibliografia e revistës KOHA: 1978-1989* [*Bibliography of KOHA Magazine: 1978-1989*] and *Bibliografia e revistës Kosova: 1972-2003* [*Bibliography of Kosova Magazine: 1972-2003*], including numerous catalogues for various Albanian authors. At present, the Bibliography Service is trying to finalize the largest bibliographic project entitled *Bibliografi e librit shqip në Kosovë: 1912-1999* [*Bibliography of Albanian Books in Kosovo: 1912-1999*].

Bibliography of Albanian Books in Kosovo: 1912-1999

This project of the NLK Bibliography Service started decades earlier and was originally called *Retrospective Bibliography of Albanian Books in Yugoslavia: 1944-1980*. It was put on hold for a long time and brought back as a new project with a larger working team, including librarians from the National Library and Central University Library, and was also extended in terms of years and contents. The 1912-1999 timeframe was set based so as not to exclude Kosovo Albanian authors who have published abroad for political reasons or because it was technically impossible for them to publish their books in Kosovo. Therefore, in general, the work on the project is guided by two basic criteria: *geographic one* and *language one*.

The first source of bibliographic information for the bibliography remains the National Library of Kosovo (manual and electronic catalogue thereof), to be followed by bibliographies published over the years, national libraries of neighbouring countries, Kosovo publishing houses, prominent figures and intellectuals of the country, etc. Accordingly, each bibliographic unit includes information on the source of the information. More than 12,000 units have been built so far, based on International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD), and

bibliographic items are accompanied by a classification in compliance with Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) and subject classification based on a short Albanian version of Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH).

Since the bibliography involves the collection of a material in the form of a book, the word *book* implies the type of material – not a manuscript, which traditionally falls into the category of *published* material (meaning it has the insignia/signature of the publisher or the printing house) – and literary works, anthologies, textbooks, music publications, official publications, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, manuals, handbooks, brochures, etc., (regardless of the number of pages of the published material). Hence, the *book* as a concept will include non-periodical publications, consisting of even a very few pages.

The plan is to organize the bibliography by subject in alphabetical order. A chronological order will be made when the same topic, written by the same author, is discussed. Exceptions will include publications of 1912-1940 period, which will be entered as separate publications under a chapter titled *Trashëgimia Literare* (alb. *Literary Heritage*), entailing the written heritage of a valuable historical period for Kosovo. But, of course, the system is still only within the scope of the project and its implementation will certainly require a lot of effort. Nevertheless, irrespective of order, the bibliography will be accompanied by an informational apparatus, which will include: index of authors; index of persons and places; index of book titles; subject indicator; index of places (cities) of publication; index of publishers; chronological index of publications; bibliographic unit location index; abbreviations (abbreviations for the republics of the former Yugoslavia and for Albania are in compliance with the MARC code list of countries format).

The plan is to publish the bibliography by the end of this year but, considering the opinion of Kosovar intellectuals as valuable, a preliminary public presentation will be made for several weeks, considering that potential advice and feedback will help increase the quality and, why not, the magnitude of the bibliography. The publication of *Bibliography of Albanian Books in Kosovo: 1912-1999* will introduce publications in Albanian language in Kosovo to pave the way for a commitment to compile the *National Bibliography of Kosovo*, because, as pointed out in the abstract, the *Bibliography of Albanian Books in Kosovo* is not equivalent to the *National Bibliography of Kosovo*.

National Bibliography of Kosovo

The *National Bibliography of Kosovo*, as a record of an entire publishing output of a country, is a widely accepted and treated concept.³ However, legal infrastructure, professional preparation and institutional accountability are required for such an output to be subject of a bibliographic registration process.

³Sec. 1. Guidelines for The National Bibliographic Agency and the National Bibliography International Federation of Library Associations: IFLA International Office for UBC, & UNESCO, 1979, 2. IFLA Working Group on Guidelines for National Bibliographies. Ed. Maja Žumer (2008). *Guidelines for National Bibliographies in the Electronic Age*, 3. Koskas, Mathilde (2021) National Bibliographies and National Bibliographic Metadata In The Age of Mass Information (<https://nur.nu.edu.kz/bitstream/handle/123456789/5842/3%20EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>)

The National Library of Kosovo, based in Prishtina, according to the Law on Libraries⁴, is the publisher of the national bibliography and a centre of receipt and submission of legal deposits; it catalogues books being published in the CIP and supplies Kosovo publications with standard international ISBN, ISMN and ISSN numbers.⁵ So, the NLK and the Department of Bibliography thereof, as directly responsible for the compilation of bibliographies, include all the mechanisms regulating the compilation of the *National Bibliography of Kosovo*. Despite all legal obligations, the compilation of the National Bibliography of Kosovo has not started yet, for many reasons.

Initially, NLK's priority was the electronic processing of its collections, which started in 2004-2005, when ALEPH 500 program was rendered operational.

In addition to that process, the NLK has been engaged, for a long time now, in raising Kosovo publishers' awareness about importance to adhere to the procedures required to obtain CIP and ISBN. Though an ISBN Office was opened at the NLK in 2001, it took a long time to convince the publishers to obtain CIP and ISBN and submit the five copies of the legal deposit. Though we are in a better situation today as regards submission of legal deposit, especially by Albanian and Turkish publishers, many publishers of other Kosovar cultures have chosen to obtain ISBNs for their publications from the neighbouring countries,⁶ which automatically exempts them from the legal obligation to submit a legal deposit, and this will certainly be reflected in the *National Bibliography of Kosovo*, whenever it will be compiled, and render introduction of Kosovo's broad cultural diversity impossible.

The work flow at the NLK and Department of Bibliography has been affected by a shortage of specialized library and information professionals. The absence of a school on libraries in Kosovo has compelled the employees to acquire their knowledge of librarianship from professional literature on librarianship and some short-term courses thereon time after time. All that because of negligent national policies. It has taken time and required professionalism, so now we can say that a professional stability has been achieved in terms of bibliographic processing of books as materials, but the same does not apply to the majority of other collections, such as newspapers, magazines, maps, photographs, audio and video recordings, electronic sources of information, official documents, etc.

Besides negligent national policies, the librarianship profession in Kosovo is also facing the negligent international policies, which is why Kosovo still does not have its code as a country in the UDC List of Country Codes (a classification that the NLK has been using since it began to classify its collections back in the '70s). This shortage renders Kosovo's recognition as a country on the classification map and, consequently, recognition of nomination as National Bibliography difficult. Moreover, the lack of ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) and ISAN (International Standard Audiovisual Numbers) codes for Kosovo has left serial and audio-visual publications out of institutional control, just like other types of publications whose legal path does not connect them with the NLK. Many institutions and individuals who publish valuable scientific and cultural journals are forced to obtain the ISSN code from the

⁴ https://www.mkrs-ks.org/repository/docs/Ligji_nr_04-L-097_per_Bibliotekat.pdf

⁵ Clarification: Though ISSN is stipulated in the law, Kosovo still does not have an ISSN number code for its serial publications.

⁶ See publications of the University of Prishtina in Mitrovica, indexed in the electronic catalogue of Serbia and bearing ISBN code 86.

neighbouring countries, which automatically excludes them from the category of *country publications*. This category does not include daily newspapers printed in Kosovo. Fortunately for both NLK and publishers of daily newspapers, the latter have brought five copies of their publications to the NLK, with the exception of the daily newspapers published in electronic format, which are not included in NLK collections, mainly due to the absence of electronic platforms to store them. All these elements represent problems not only for the *National Bibliography of Kosovo*, but also for the acquisition of NLK collections, besides laws that do not favour much acquisition of collections, which must be done through a tendering procedure, and the fact that the library often depends on the terms offered by the seller.

In spite of all the foregoing, the NLK must start working on the compilation of the *National Bibliography of Kosovo* sooner rather than later, either as a legal or cultural obligation, because there are cultural productions covering more than two decades waiting to close the door of production behind and enter the door of history, where production information belongs to everyone, at any time and in any place.

The delay in the compilation of the *National Bibliography of Kosovo* imposes the need to start the compilation in two forms simultaneously, namely: a *Retrospective National Bibliography*, which can be strongly supported by bibliographic information processed in the ALEPH 500 Program, but also the materials of the CIP and ISBN Office, where all pre-publication catalogues from 2008 onwards have been archived in electronic folders; and a *Coherent National Bibliography*, a bibliography which, as mentioned earlier, will not be able to record all the publishing output inside Kosovo, but will be able to record, eventually, the materials that are published and disseminated as per legal obligations. That is because by claiming a wider coverage of bibliographic records, publications that keep Kosovo's cultural life alive and outnumber *problematic publications* are being *damaged* as a matter of fact. Accordingly, time has come for the *National Bibliography of Kosovo* to come to light and for it to take its sister bibliographies around the world as models, to learn from and build on their experience, just as it should learn from the big IFLA family, hoping that this big family will hold it by the hand, guide it and help it become part of it in an either physical or electronic form.

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